

Tree of Knowledge

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Ancient oak served as first post office

DUXBURY — The year before the Revolutionary War and for the next 71 years, Duxbury mail was delivered to and picked up at a tree at the intersection of South and Summer streets in the Tarkiln section of town.

A granite marker now delineates the site. It reads, "Tree of Knowledge, 1774-1845. Mail box on oak tree for post riders and stages between Plymouth and Boston."

The tree's name was chosen because both good and bad knowledge was learned from the letters placed under it, wrote Joan Schlueter in the town's 350th anniversary program.

"The first mails were delivered by runners, often native Americans, and later by post riders, many of whom later became stage drivers," she said. In 1796 the stage coaches took over mail deliveries and stops were made in Duxbury three times a week.

"From early colonial times it was customary for Duxbury citizens to leave letters or parcels at a tree, by tradition a large oak, which stood by the road where Massachusetts Bay Path met the path from Tinkertown — at the juncture of Summer and South streets. After the post office was established, a box was nailed to the tree and the stage picked up the mail there," Schlueter wrote.